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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 008129

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/04/2026
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [KTIA](#) [MOPS](#) [IN](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: INDIA'S MEA PROVIDES READOUT OF SRI LANKA'S
PRESIDENT'S VISIT

REF: COLOMBO 02014

Classified By: Political Counselor Ted Osius for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The Ministry of External Affairs' Joint Secretary responsible for Sri Lanka, Mr. Mohan Kumar,

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provided Polcouns with a readout of Minister of External Affairs Pranab Mukherjee's meeting with Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa. Kumar said that Mukherjee hammered home four points and received the following responses:
-No military solution is possible. Kumar reported that President Rajapaksa agreed.
-Civilian casualties are becoming a grave concern. Rajapaksa responded that the GOSL was doing its best to limit civilian casualties.
-A southern consensus on the devolution of power needs to be developed quickly, LTTE actions/reactions notwithstanding. Rajapaksa insisted that more time was needed to allow the MOU signed between the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the United National Party (UNP) "time to flower."
-The North-East merger is a fundamental part of any peace process. Rajapaksa retorted that the Supreme Court's rejection of the merger was based on process, and the Parliament was free to sign a new bill merging the north and east at any time.

12. (C) Referring to LTTE leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran's annual Heroes Day address, Kumar asserted that it was notable as much for what was omitted as its content. Specifically, he noted that there was, "no reference to the northeast merger or a political settlement as a viable option to Eelam." He said he personally believes that the LTTE has lost faith in a political solution and that the hard-line

tenor of the statement was not a negotiating ploy. Kumar also stated that the GOI is interested to know if the Co-Chair members (excluding the U.S.) are truly supportive of the Norwegians continuing in their role as facilitators in the peace process and asked if U/S Burns would help clarify this during his visit to New Delhi next week. Polcouns said that he will pass the request to Washington. This question may reflect the GOSL's sentiments toward Norwegian Special Envoy, Jon Hanssen-Bauer, noted in Reftel A and, perhaps, expressed by President Rajapaksa during his meetings in New Delhi. END SUMMARY

----- Mukherjee warns that there is no military solution -----

13. (C) On 1 December Polcouns requested a briefing on the 28 November meeting in New Delhi between Minister of External Affairs Pranab Mukherjee and Sri Lanka's President, Mahinda Rajapaksa, by the Ministry of External Affairs' Joint Secretary (JS) for Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Burma and the

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Maldives, Mr. Mohan Kumar. The JS emphasized that the India-Sri Lanka relationship was based on "constant interaction" at the highest levels, and India continued to monitor the situation very closely. He said that Mukherjee began the meeting by stating flatly that there was no military solution to the conflict in Sri Lanka. The JS claimed that President Rajapaksa agreed and stated that the GOSL is ready for unconditional talks; however, the LTTE's position is that talks are contingent upon the re-opening of the Apha 9 Highway, and the GOSL refuses any stipulations. The JS remarked that he tried to explore the GOSL strategy behind its military actions in sidebar meetings and, as far as he could determine, they were not an attempt to weaken the LTTE before future negotiations. Rather, maneuvers in the

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field were performed out of fear that a dramatic LTTE offensive was imminent. He reported that the GOSL believed that the LTTE attack would probably take place in Colombo. The GOSL's fears were well-founded, Kumar later asserted, as the Defense Ministry Secretary and brother of the President, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, was the target of a suicide bomber in Colombo on 4 December.

----- GOI getting fed up with civilian casualties -----

14. (C) Mukherjee also conveyed the GOI's concern with the rising number of civilian casualties. He reiterated the GOI's "article of faith" that Tamils are distinguished from LTTE cadres but recent GOSL military actions were blurring the distinction. GOSL actions were also driving moderate Tamils into the arms of the LTTE. The JS said that Mukherjee warned the Sri Lankan President that the international community was watching the situation closely. Rajapaksa responded that the GOSL was doing its best to limit civilian casualties.

----- "The political process must commence as soon as possible" -----

15. (C) According to Kumar, the Minister stated that the GOSL needs to show progress on a viable political process that provided protection for all ethnicities. He contended that it was the responsibility of the GOSL to continue to advance the political process even if proposals are rejected by the LTTE. Referring to the "Southern consensus," Mukherjee said that Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) and the United National Party (UNP) on 23 October, 2006, must stay on track, as it will lead to a southern consensus on a devolution of power scheme.

----- "Merger of North and East is vital to a permanent solution" -----

¶6. (C) Kumar reported that Mukherjee emphasized that the north-east merger was a "fundamental part of the peace process." President Rajapaksa responded that the de-merger order by the Supreme Court was a legal maneuver and does not rule out Parliament's option to introduce another merger bill. He reminded Mukherjee that he was essentially heading a "minority government" and noted that there were questions regarding Ranil Wickremesinghe's leadership in the UNP. He claimed that Wickremesinghe "does not have the numbers to push through a consensus within the UNP." The JS also quoted Rajapaksa as saying that the "MOU must have time to flower." The JS noted that, unsurprisingly, in a separate meeting with Wickremesinghe on 30 November, the UNP leader appeared "cocky" and gave no signal that he was experiencing leadership problems within the UNP.

¶7. (C) Turning to GOSL responses to LTTE leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran's annual Heroes Day address, the JS said that President Rajapaksa was "dismissive" and basically told his interlocutors, "we told you so." When Polcouns asked about his perception of the Prabhakaran speech, the JS commented that what was most significant was what was missing from the speech: specifically, neither mention of a north-east merger nor mention of the potential for a political settlement. He asserted that it signals the LTTE has lost faith the political process and sees no viable option to total independence. In his view, the hard-line stance taken by

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Prabhakaran is more worrisome than deemed by the GOSL and was not merely an empty gesture aimed at future negotiations.

¶8. (C) According to JS Kumar, no specific military assistance was discussed at the Mukherjee-Rajapaksa meeting. However, increased surveillance of LTTE maritime supply routes was requested. In addition, the GOI said that it will listen to subsequent proposals for arms. The JS expressed the GOI's interest in gauging the degree of support by other co-chairs for Norway's continued role as the primary facilitator in the peace process. (NOTE: This may be a reference to complaints about Norway's perceived bias toward the LTTE as noted in Reftel A and, most likely, shared with by Rajapaksa with the GOI. END NOTE.) Polcouns noted the JS's request for Undersecretary Nicholas Burns' clarification and told the JS that he would convey it to Washington.

¶9. (C) COMMENT: Kumar's report on the atmospherics of the Mukherjee-Rajapaksa meeting is in contrast to many media reports reporting friction in the bilateral relationship. The 29 November edition of the "Hindustan Times" noted that, "Indian officials are irked by what they term the Sri Lankan government's 'intransigent' attitude towards the country's ethnic problem" under the headline, "Sri Lanka ignoring India's advice." When Polcouns asked about various press reports suggesting India's frustration with the Rajapaksa government, Kumar replied, "the India media is way off base on this." While this may be true, there is no doubt that the absence of a joint statement or photo opportunity after Rajapaksa's meeting with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh sends a signal to Tamil Nadu that the GOI is not pleased with rising casualties among the minority Tamils and is voicing its displeasure quietly. In addition, Mr. Kumar's more than casual inquiry regarding support for Norway's continued leading role as mediator in the Sri Lanka conflict lends more credence to Norwegian Special Envoy Jon Hanssen-Bauer's suspicions that the GOSL perceives him as being biased toward the LTTE and may be ramping up its effort to discredit Norway's efforts in the war torn nation (see reftel A). END COMMENT
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